

Written Testimony of Representative Jim Himes (CT-04)
Make It in America: What's Next?
PANEL 2: Skills Training for the Future

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. The global economy is rapidly changing and American workers and business must adapt to face this changing landscape. It is my sincere belief that, given the proper training and resources, American workers can out-build and out-compete the rest of the world. It's partially the job of the federal government to implement policies that can help workers and companies fulfill this promise.

Continued American success in the future is going to result from pursuing policies that are forward looking, not policies that try to return us to the economy of fifty years ago. The dual trends of globalization and increasing technology have changed the way that the American factory floor looks, and has increased the level of skill necessary for many manufacturing jobs.

I recently had the opportunity to tour the mile-plus-long assembly line of a BMW factory, and I was struck by the hundreds of robots I saw, each with an assigned job, piecing the cars together. During that same time, I saw fewer than a dozen people, most of them occupied with ensuring that the robots were working smoothly.

This tour should raise the eyebrows of anyone concerned with America's place in the global economy for two reasons. First, according to the Brookings Institute, Germany uses 3 times as many industrial robots per hour worked as the United States. This allows plants to run longer and more efficiently and puts us at serious competitive disadvantage. Second, this automation has changed the balance of jobs at BMW. Instead of row upon row of welders, there are offices full of programmers. The jobs are still there, they just require drastically different skills in the 21st Century than they did in the 20th.

Thankfully, the solution to this problem is right in front of us. We need to dedicate the necessary resources to train new workers, and retrain current workers, with the skills they need to succeed in the new economy. This starts in elementary education and high school with an increased emphasis on the STEM knowledge that today's jobs require, and continues in higher education. Not just in traditional, four-year colleges, but in community colleges and trade schools as well.

Housatonic Community College, in my district, is an institution preparing its students for the 21st Century workforce. It is one of only four facilities for training in advanced manufacturing in the state, and 96% of the graduates of its manufacturing program this spring found jobs. Housatonic is also training students in jobs that are non-exportable, such as computer information technology and health care workers, including a new medical assistant program, where jobs usually start at around \$50,000 a year.

And these skilled workers are desperately needed. A few years ago, I visited James Ippolito & Co, a precision manufacturer in Bridgeport, CT, to talk about the challenges and opportunities they were facing. At James Ippolito, the problem wasn't too few jobs, but that there were not enough skilled workers to fill the available

positions. How can companies be expected to grow and drive our economy if they don't have the properly trained employees to do so? That's why education and job training are so vital.

The path forward is clear. We cannot undo technological advances, or refuse to participate in the global marketplace. Instead, we must help prepare our workers by providing education and new skills to provide security for American families.